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PRESS RELEASE

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Ambassador's Statement on Elections in Azerbaijan

The United States welcomes the announcement from the Government of Azerbaijan's Central Election Commission that the date of the presidential election will be October 9, 2013. Now that the active stage of the election season has begun, we call on the government of Azerbaijan to ensure a free and fair electoral process that reflects the will of the people. In 1918, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic became the first democratic nation in the Muslim world. We urge Azerbaijani authorities to act in accordance with that proud history and to honor their commitments, to their citizens and the international community alike, to respect the freedoms of assembly, association, and speech as well as respect for the rule of law before, during, and after the presidential contest.

We are encouraged by the Central Election Commission's efforts to educate constituent election commission heads, voters, and the police on their rights and responsibilities, to limit improprieties when voting begins. But free and fair elections constitute more than what happens on election day. To guarantee an unbiased pre-election environment, the government of Azerbaijan should make sure all political parties and interested groups have equal access to the media, the freedom to register their candidates, and the freedom to hold campaign events and regular party meetings in venues across the country without interference. This includes creating the atmosphere for a healthy civic dialogue, which allows the country's citizens—including the young—to express their hopes for the country on-line, in print, in meeting halls, and non-violently in convenient and easily accessible public places without fear of administrative or indefinite pre-trial detention or other intimidation. We strongly urge a speedy, transparent, and

fair resolution, pursuant to the rule of law, of the legal proceedings against youth activists, journalists, and political leaders, including Ilgar Mammadov and Tofiq Yagublu.

Furthermore, we encourage Azerbaijan to follow through expeditiously on its verbal promise to issue a formal invitation to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to monitor the presidential election. The authorities should register domestic election observers and permit them to monitor election activities freely throughout the country. With the constructive engagement of the government and a free and peaceful exchange of opinions, this presidential election presents an opportunity to strengthen Azerbaijan, thus reinforcing our shared interest in Azerbaijan's future prosperity and stability.

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